

The primary federal regulatory tool protecting wetlands against development is Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) with oversight from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Under Section 404, it is necessary to secure a permit from the ACOE in order to fill a jurisdictional wetland. A wetland is jurisdictional as determined by the ACOE. Failure to secure a permit can result in civil and/or criminal penalties.

In order to protect the wetland, lake, and stream resources of McHenry County, isolated and jurisdictional wetland impacts are prohibited by the McHenry County Stormwater Management Ordinance, unless all applicable regulatory approvals or clearances are granted prior to the onset of the development activity. Projects involving both jurisdictional and isolated wetlands will require coordination between the ACOE and McHenry County for the permitting process.



Woodstock, Illinois

Effective protection of our state's wetlands requires the involvement of not only state and federal agencies, but also our local citizens. Please participate in the protection of these precious resources.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Aldo Leopold, American Ecologist

1887-1948



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McHENRY COUNTY ILLINOIS



WETLANDS

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WHAT ARE WETLANDS?

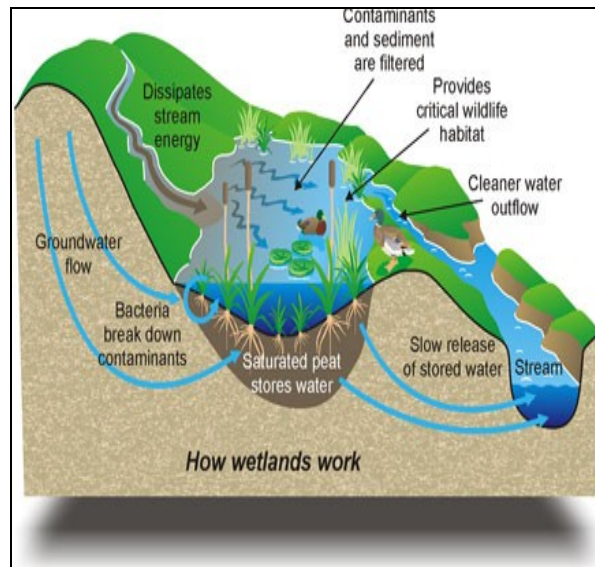
Wetlands are areas that are either covered with shallow water or have soils saturated with water for extended periods during the growing season. They are characterized by the presence of three parameters—water, hydric soils (soils that lack oxygen) and hydrophytic plants (plants that grow in water or under saturated soil conditions).

Within Illinois, wetlands may be found associated with rivers and lakes, such as forested wetlands and swamps. Wetlands may also be isolated from rivers or lakes, such as wet meadows, marshes, and bogs. Typically bogs and fens (low, flat, swamp land), are located in the northern regions of the state, while forested wetlands and swamps are located in the southern reaches of the state. Marshes and wet meadows are located across the central and northeastern reaches of the state.



Why are Wetlands Important?

Wetlands act like giant sponges, absorbing water during floods and storms. Instead of washing downstream and transporting sediment, water in wetlands slowly soaks into the ground. Depending upon whether it is a dry or wet year, wetlands may perform different functions, serving as habitat for different assemblages of plants and animals, and contributing more or less control over the flow rates of nearby streams.



Wetlands provide valuable functions such as: flood prevention and stream control, threatened endangered species habitat, wildlife and fish habitat, improved water quality, and aesthetics and recreation.

What is the Status of Illinois Wetlands?

Although wetlands can provide many public benefits, those benefits are at risk. The predominant cause of wetland losses is generally conversion to agricultural crops, although in northeastern Illinois, conversion to urban uses is the major threat. Since 1818, Illinois has lost nearly 90% of its wetland acreage, ranking it sixth nationally in converting wetlands to other uses.

In McHenry County, 5.3% of the total acreage of the county, or 20,709 acres, is covered by natural wetlands. This exceeds the statewide average of 2.4% per county. The six northeastern Illinois counties comprise 6.7% of the state's wetland acreage. McHenry County is second highest of the six northeastern counties.

Wetland Protection

Northeastern Illinois is fortunate to have a greater percentage of natural wetlands remaining than much of the rest of the state, but the existence of many wetlands continues to be at risk. This is why the U.S. Government and McHenry County have created a number of approaches to wetland protection including: regulation, economic incentives, education, and restoration activities.